

E0159

BOTTOM-UP APPROACH FOR SYNTHESIS OF REGISTER TRANSFER LEVEL (RTL) BASED DESIGN

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application contains subject matter related to the subject matter disclosed in copending U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/173,489, filed on December 29, 1999 (our Docket No. 52352-663).

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of integrated circuit design, and more particularly, to the synthesis of register transfer level (RTL) based design.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 The synthesis of register transfer level (RTL) based design is a process of translating a hardware descriptive language (HDL) coded design to required technology logic gates based on library technology provided and given timing constraints. In order for a design to be synthesized to the required technology logic gates, timing constraints are normally imposed from the top level onto the input and output pins. Based on the timing constraints of the input and output pins, the logic gates are inferred based on the HDL-coded design to meet these timing constraints. This achieves the required
15 speed of operation and logic functionality using the logic gate library technology provided.

However, current designs are increasingly complex and larger, and incorporate more functionality into a smaller piece of silicon. The approach of synthesizing designs using top-level synthesis by imposing the timing constraints of input and output pins creates a bottleneck in achieving a fast turn-around time for achieving a required speed of operation and logic functionality to satisfy the
20 demanding fast time-to-market environment of integrated circuit innovations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

There is a need for a method for synthesizing RTL based design that achieves a quick turn-around time and design of an integrated circuit in order to meet fast time-to-market environment of integrated circuit innovations.

25 This and other needs are satisfied by the present invention which provides a method of synthesizing a register transfer level (RTL) based design of a system. The method comprises the steps of determining sub-modules of a top-level system and determining individual time budgets for each

sub-module based on timing requirements of the top-level system. Gate-level designs of the sub-modules are synthesized based on the determined time budgets for the individual sub-modules. The gate-level designs of the individual sub-modules are integrated to form a top-level design. The top-level design is tested for conformance with top-level design requirements. A top-level netlist is generated when the top-level design conforms to the top-level designer requirements.

By performing this "bottom-up" approach towards synthesizing the RTL based design, the logic design sub-modules can be synthesized independently as a stand-alone design more efficiently and achieve a better area optimization while at the same time meeting the logic functionality and speed of operation requirements of the whole design. Also, the breaking up of the large and complex top-level design into a few logical sub-modules or sub-blocks permits the achievement of a quick turn-around time for design to meet the fast time-to-market requirements of integrated circuit innovations.

The foregoing and other features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of the present invention when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a top-level system and sub-modules of the system.

Figure 2 is a block diagram that depicts the breakdown of a top-level synthesis to a sub-module synthesis for the bottom-up approach for synthesis of RTL based design in accordance with the embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 3 is a block diagram flow of the synthesis of RTL based design for a sub-module in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a flow chart of a method for a bottom-up synthesis of RTL design of an integrated circuit in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention addresses and solves problems associated with the synthesis of RTL based design from a top-level design while meeting the timing constraints in a fast and efficient manner. This is achieved in the present invention through a bottom-up approach toward the synthesis of the RTL based design. In such an approach, a large and complex design is divided into a plurality of logical sub-modules of block designs. These logic design modules are synthesized independently as stand-alone designs in a more efficient manner. A better area of optimization is achieved, while meeting the logical functionality and speed of operation requirements of the whole design.

Figure 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of an integrated circuit layout. The entire layout is indicated by reference numeral 10, representing the top-level design. The top-level design has certain timing requirements and other design constraints. For purposes of explanation in the following, the integrated circuit top-level design 10 is considered to be dividable into sub-modules A,

B, C, referenced by numerals 12, 14 and 16 in Figure 1. The sub-modules 12-16 represent different logic functions and have different operational timing requirements and time budgets.

Each of the sub-modules 12-16 will have different timing requirements defined for each sub-module's input and output signals. Also, each of the sub-modules 12-16 will have different wire loading and input/output signal loadings. In accordance with the process of the present invention, the bottom-up approach to synthesize the RTL based design of the integrated circuit 10 treats each of these sub-modules 12-16 independently in the synthesis, and then integrates the independently synthesized designs of the sub-modules 12-16.

Figure 2 is a block diagram depicting the breakdown of a top-level synthesis to a sub-module synthesis for the bottom-up approach of synthesis of RTL based design in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. In the present invention, the timing requirements of the top-level design are determined, in block 20. These timing requirements for the top-level design are used in the synthesis of the top-level RTL based design in block 22. In conventional approaches, the top-level RTL is then used to synthesize the top-level design of the integrated circuit. From the synthesis of the top-level design provided in block 24, the gates of the top-level design are provided in a netlist, as depicted in block 36. The dashed lines in Figure 2 represent the prior art approach to the synthesis of an RTL based design using a top-level synthesis flow, instead of the bottom-up approach of the present invention.

As depicted in Figure 2, the timing requirements of the top-level design are used in the present invention to form a time-budget for the system, as depicted by block 26. Time-budgeting is a process of defining all of the timing requirements of input and output signals of each sub-module design to achieve functional operability as well as speed of operation of the top-level design. Hence, the time-budget 26 process provides the timing for the different sub-modules A, B, C. This is depicted in the synthesis of Figure 2 by blocks 28. The timing requirements of sub-modules A, B, C, provided in block 28, are used in the synthesis process of each of the individual sub-modules.

The top-level RTL is broken down into 3 logical RTL blocks, sub-module A RTL, sub-module B RTL and sub-module C RTL. These are represented by blocks 30 in Figure 2. With the input of the timing requirements for the individual sub-module, and the sub-module RTL, broken down from the top-level RTL, a synthesis of each sub-module as a stand-alone design is performed as depicted in blocks 32. The synthesis process of an individual sub-module will be described later with respect to Figure 3. The synthesis of each sub-module design is performed independently, and generates a stand-alone design. Such a synthesis is performed in accordance with conventional RTL and synthesis techniques for the individual sub-module designs.

Each sub-module A, B, C undergoes an iterative process in order to meet the timing requirements of its input and output signals. Once a static timing analysis performed on each sub-

module design verifies the timing requirements, a sub-module netlist is produced, as depicted in blocks 34. The netlist is a list of components and connections for the sub-modules.

It is only after each of the sub-modules A, B, C have been designed and verified for conformance with the individual timing requirements for those sub-modules, based upon the time-budgeting process, that the designs for the individual sub-modules are integrated into a top-level design. This is depicted in block 36. The top-level design netlist that is generated, which includes all of the integrated sub-modules, undergoes a static timing analysis using the top-level timing requirements, block 20, to verify input and output speed of operations. Also during this process, the internal signal timing paths between all of the sub-modules are also checked to meet the timing requirements.

System-level verification test suites that are normally used to verify functionality of a top-level RTL-based design are used to verify the integrated top-level design that integrates the sub-module designs. The verification test suites check the logic functionality as well as the operational timing requirements of the integrated top-level design against the design functional and timing specifications.

Figure 3 depicts a typical flow of the synthesis of an RTL-based design for a sub-module, as depicted by block 32 in Figure 2. This synthesis of an RTL-based design may be used for top-level designs or for individual sub-module designs. The synthesis finds particular application in the present invention for synthesizing sub-modules, which are then integratable into a top-level design, rather than using the synthesis to directly synthesize the top-level design.

In the typical flow of synthesis of an RTL-based design, the synthesis/optimization process is represented by block 46 and receives as inputs the timing requirements of the design 40, RTL design 42 for that logic, and the wire loading and I/O loading/drivers 44 for that logic. The synthesis/optimization process uses these inputs to generate the logic design and a logic gate netlist for the sub-module. This is depicted in blocks 46 and 48. Based upon the logic gate design, verification is performed and is represented by block 50. The verifications include a static timing analysis 52, dynamic simulation of the circuitry 54, and other formal verifications typically used in RTL-based design. When the requirements are met, as depicted by decision block 58, the RTL synthesis and timing optimization for the sub-module is complete. Referring back to Figure 2, the sub-module netlist may then be integrated with the other sub-module netlists to form a top-level netlist. If the requirements are not met, the process returns back to one of the previous process steps, depending on which requirements are not met. The process is iterated to optimize or re-synthesize to meet the timing requirements for that sub-module.

The time-budgeting is performed to define timing requirements for each of the sub-modules. The initial floor planning of the designs extracted an initial estimated wire load model and loading information to be imposed on the sub-module level synthesis. Based on these timing and design requirements, each of the sub-module designs undergoes the synthesis process.

When the verifications are passed, the top-level netlist is fed to a back-end process where the top-level netlist is placed and routed. When the place and route process is completed, more accurate extracted information is used in the synthesis of the sub-module levels to provide final and more accurate optimizations. The synthesis of the sub-modules is repeated to achieve the final top-level design that meets all the timing requirements and functional specifications of the top-level design.

The procedures described above are summarized in the flow chart of Figure 4 in which the top-level timing requirements are provided in step 60. The time-budget of each of the sub-modules determines the timing requirements for each of the sub-modules, as provided in step 62. Each of the sub-modules undergoes independent gate-level synthesis in steps 64. The gate-level synthesis for the sub-module design is based on the timing requirements, wire load modules, and I/O signal loadings, for example. Verification of the performance of the gate-level design of the sub-modules are performed in step 65. These include static timing analysis, dynamic simulations and other formal verifications. It is then determined in steps 66 for each of the sub-modules whether the timing requirements for the sub-modules are met. If they are not met, the synthesis process for the individual sub-module or sub-modules are performed until the timing requirements are met and verifications passed.

Once an individual sub-module has passed the timing requirements and verifications, as determined in step 66, a gate-level netlist is provided in step 68 to be integrated in step 70 with the other gate-level netlists of the other sub-modules to form a top-level design netlist. The integrated top-level design netlist is then tested in step 71 in the same manner as each of the individual sub-modules in step 65. It is determined in step 72 whether the integrated top-level netlist and design satisfies all of the top-level timing requirements and other verifications performed on the top-level final design. If it does not, the process returns to step 62 or steps 64 to re-perform the synthesis of the sub-modules.

When the final integrated top-level design passes the verification procedure, as determined in step 72, a top-level netlist is fed through the back-end process where the top-level netlist is generated (step 74) and then placed and routed (step 76). Once the place and route process is completed, more accurate extracted information is used to impose on the sub-module synthesis to produce a final and more accurate optimization of the design. This is depicted by the determination in step 78 whether the optimization is finalized. If the optimization is considered to be a final optimization, the process is exited.

The bottom-up approach for synthesis of RTL-based design, using independent synthesis of sub-modules of a top-level design, provides fast and accurate design of a large and complex circuit, while satisfying overall timing and design requirements of the top-level design.

Although the present invention has been described and illustrated in detail, it is to be understood that the same is by way of illustration and example only and is not to be taken by way of limitation, the scope of the present invention being limited only by the terms of the appended claims.